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Potential workers

Potential labour supply of people who are not working, including wanting to work, availability for work, job attachment and job search.

Reference period February 2022

Released 24/05/2022

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Key statistics

In February 2022, there were 20.7 million people in the usually resident civilian population who were aged 15 years or over, of whom:

- 13.4 million were employed.
- 1.8 million were not working but wanted to work (potential workers).
- 5.5 million did not want to work or were permanently not able to work (not potential workers).

More information from the annual Participation, Job Search and Mobility (PJSM)

survey is available in these topic-based releases:

- [Job mobility \(/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release\)](/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release)
- [Underemployed workers \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/latest-release\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/underemployed-workers/latest-release) (due for release 24 June 2022)

Tables related to Underemployed workers with results from the February 2022 survey are available now in [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release\)](/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release).

Microdata from the PJSM survey for 2015 to 2022 will be available in [DataLab \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/datalab\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/datalab) on 27 May 2022 as a supplementary file to the [Longitudinal Labour Force \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/longitudinal-labour-force-australia\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/longitudinal-labour-force-australia). For more information, refer to [Microdata and TableBuilder: Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia\)](/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/available-microdata-tablebuilder/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia).

Potential workers and marginal attachment to the labour force

Since 2021, a simpler approach has been used for presenting statistics on unused labour supply. This Potential workers release of PJSM data presents statistics on all people who are not employed (i.e. regardless of their classification in the monthly Labour Force Survey as unemployed or not in the labour force), and the extent to which they may be regarded as "Potential workers" based on their circumstances and activities.

Historically, PJSM content has been presented using the marginal attachment framework and the characteristics of people "not participating in the labour force" were based on the criteria used to derive unemployment (i.e. job search activity and/or availability).

While the new approach to presenting statistics for potential workers differs slightly from the traditional marginal attachment framework, and presents some population groups that do not entirely overlap with some of the marginally attached groups, there is still a strong alignment between them. Statistics within the traditional marginal attachment framework are also still available.

People who want to work

In February 2022, there were 20.7 million people in the usually resident civilian population who were aged 15 years or over, of whom:

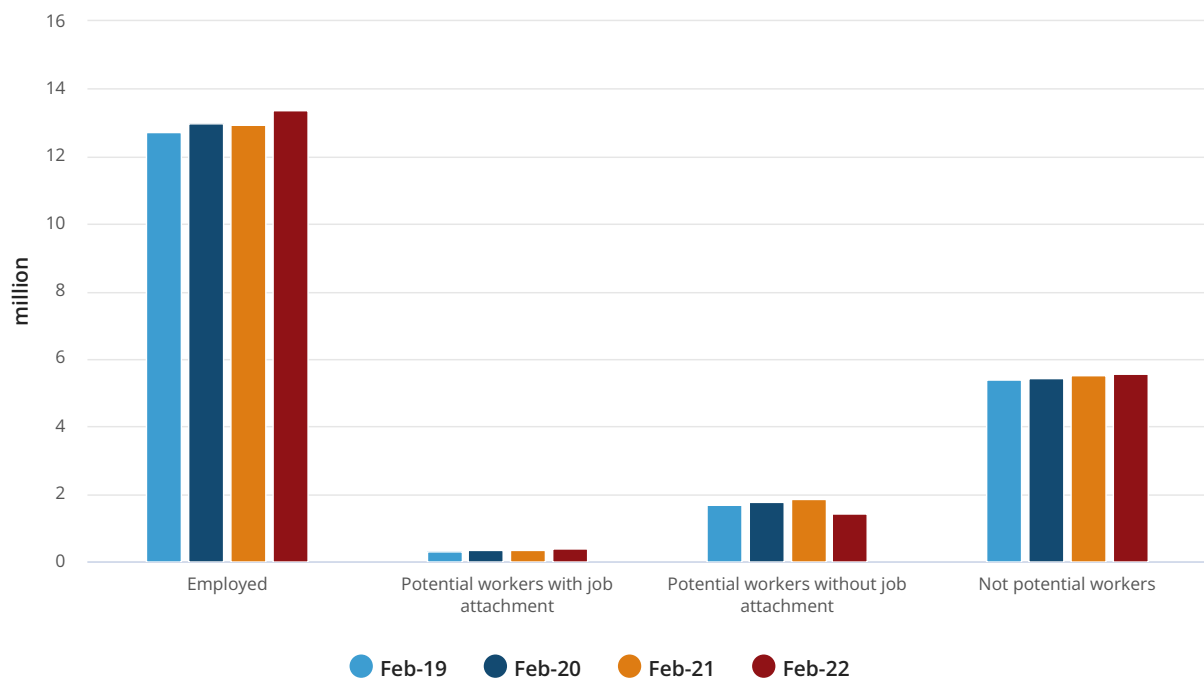
- 13.4 million were employed.
- 1.8 million were not working but wanted to work (potential workers).
- 5.5 million did not want to work or were permanently not able to work (not potential workers).

Of the 1.8 million potential workers:

- 0.4 million were attached to a job that they were about to start or were away from a job that they could return to.
- 1.4 million were without a job.

Between February 2021 and February 2022, the number of potential workers without job attachment fell from 1.8 million to 1.4 million. Over the same period, employment rose from 12.9 to 13.3 million. For more information on the rise in employment, refer to [Job mobility \(/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release\)](https://statistics.labour.gov.uk/job-mobility/latest-release).

Chart 1: Employment and potential workers

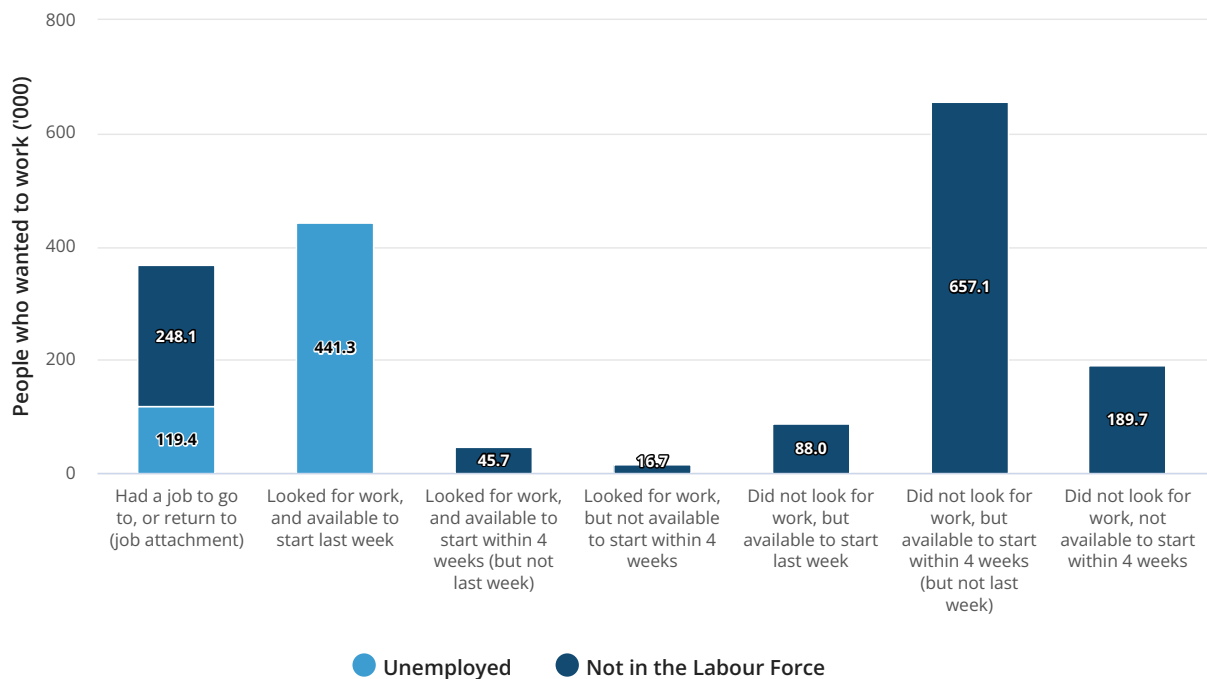


Of the 1.8 million potential workers:

- 503,700 looked for work
- 367,500 had a job to go to, or return to (potential workers with job attachment)
- 934,700 did not look for work

Over three-quarters of those who wanted to work, but did not look for work, were available to start in the previous week or within the next four weeks.

Chart 2: People who wanted to work



Marginal attachment framework

- Image
- Description

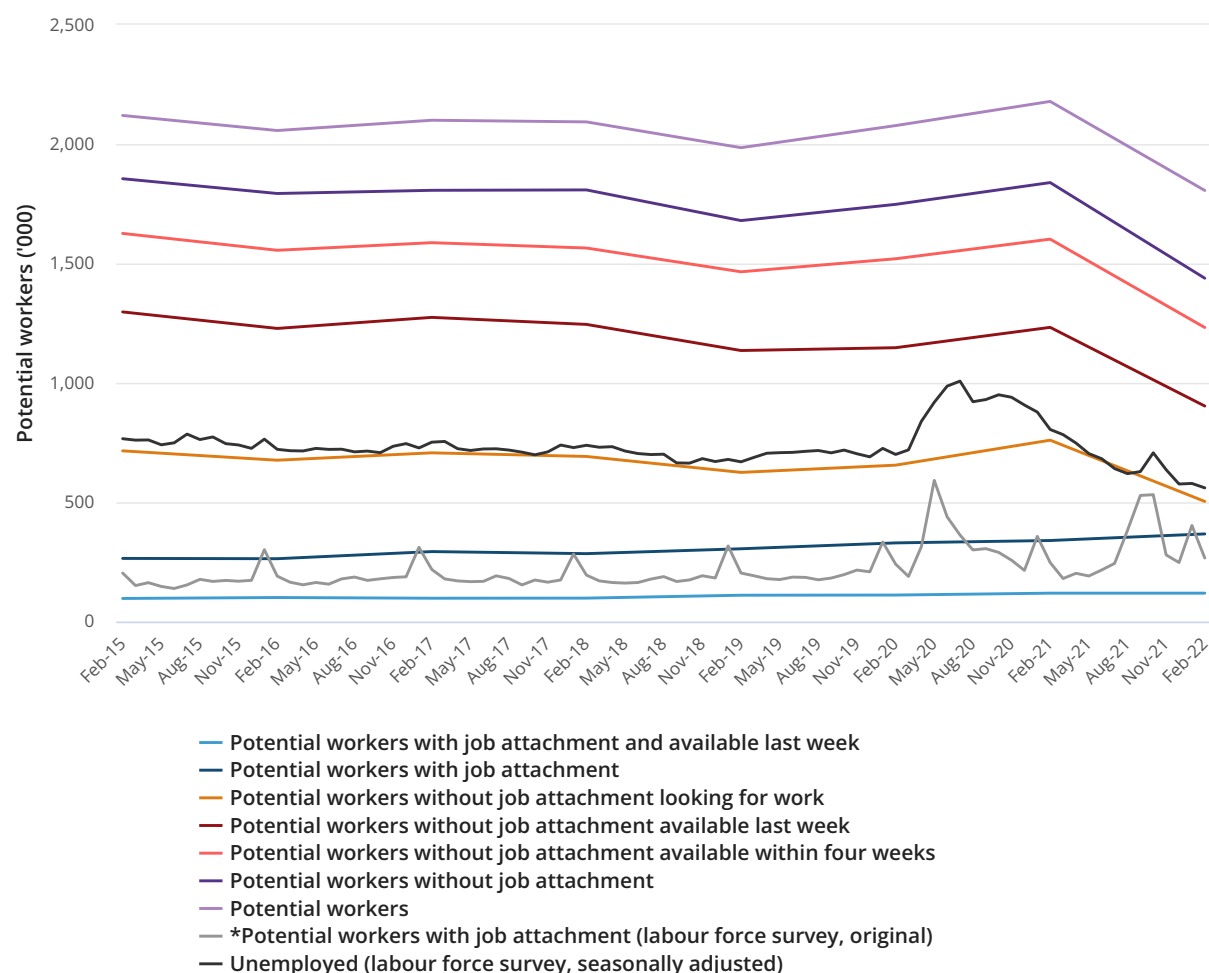
Measures of potential workers

The number of unemployed people is an important measure for monitoring the labour market. Unemployment is necessarily strictly defined to reflect an economic measure of the immediately active and available labour supply, at a specific point in time.

However, there are additional ways to look at the potential workforce - either as potential workers now or potential workers in the short to medium-term. Note that in this context, the potential workforce reflects people within the usually resident population in Australia in February 2022, and does not account for potential workers from other countries (including former or future residents of Australia, who may work in the Australian labour market in the future).

In February 2022, there were 1.8 million people who were potential workers. This was 12 per cent of the 15.2 million people in the 'potential labour force' (i.e. those who were either employed or were a potential worker). Of these, 560,700 were classified as unemployed.

Chart 3: Potential workers



*Note: the monthly series of Potential workers with job attachment from the labour force survey provided above (grey line) is not as comprehensively measured as the annual surveys of PJSM, which asks additional questions to determine a greater extent of job attachment. Although it is not as complete, the monthly series does provide some additional context to the unusual movements that happened in the months between the annual surveys that would otherwise be hidden.

State and territory

The states or territories with the lowest potential workers to population ratios in February

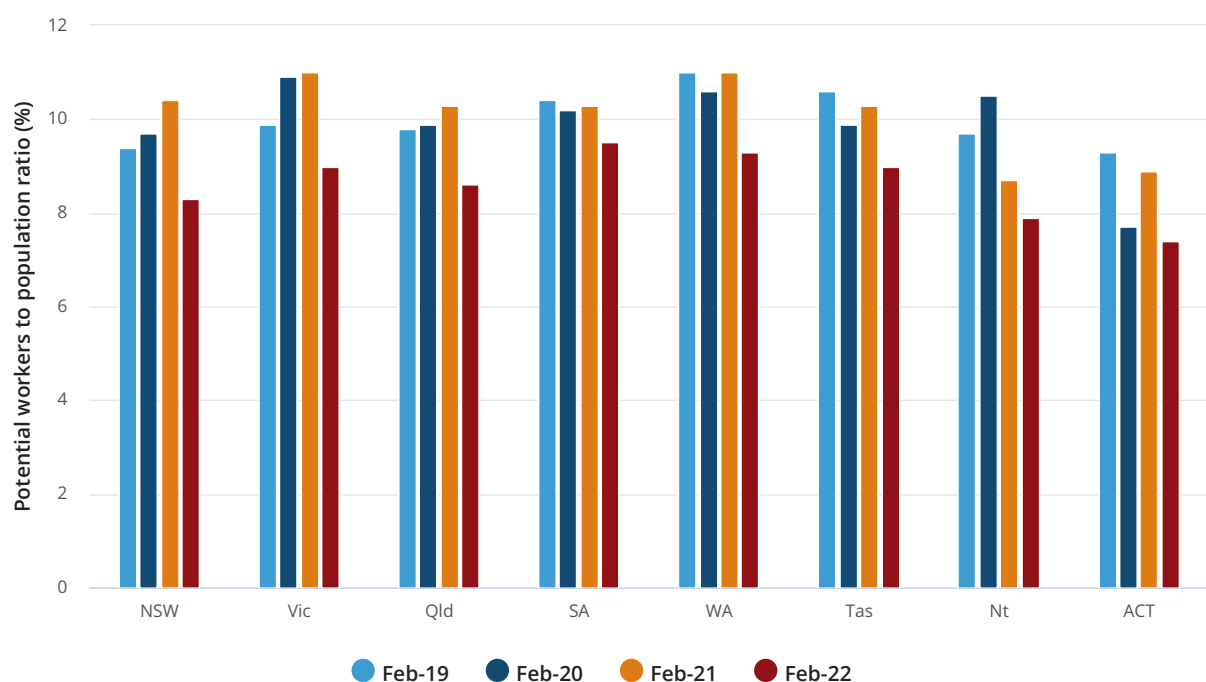
2022 were:

- Australian Capital Territory - 7.4 per cent.
- Northern Territory - 7.9 per cent.
- New South Wales - 8.3 per cent.

All states and territories saw a fall in potential workers between February 2021 and February 2022. The states or territories with the greatest fall in potential workers to population ratios were:

- New South Wales - down 2.1 percentage points (from 10.4 per cent to 8.3 per cent).
- Victoria - down 2.0 points (from 11.0 per cent to 9.0 per cent).
- Queensland - down 1.7 points (from 10.3 per cent to 8.6 per cent).

Chart 4: Potential workers by state and territory



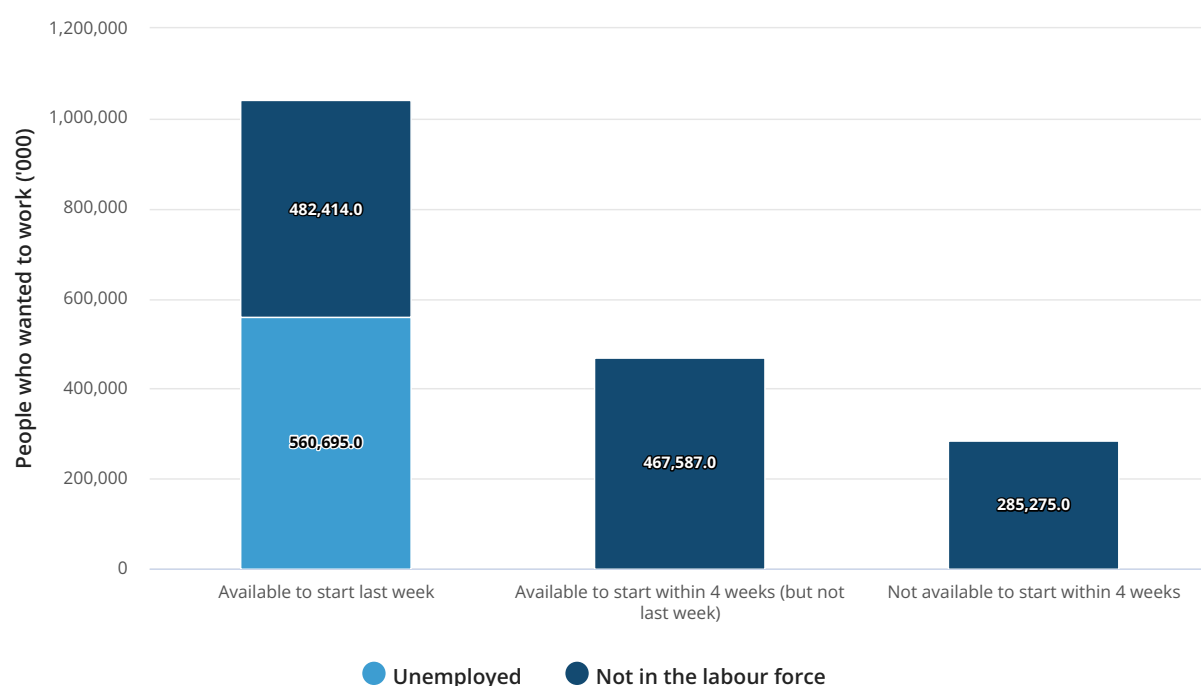
Availability for work

Not all potential workers are available to start work immediately. Of the 1.8 million people in

February 2022 who wanted to work:

- 1.0 million were available to start work in the previous week.
- 467,600 were available to start work within four weeks (but not last week).
- 285,300 were not available to start work within four weeks.

Chart 5: People who wanted to work and availability for work



The main reasons people who wanted to work were not available to start within four weeks were:

- Caring for children – 71,200 (25 per cent of those who were not available within four weeks).
- Own long-term health condition or disability – 55,300 (19 per cent).
- Studying, or returning to studies – 49,200 (17 per cent).
- Own short-term health condition or injury – 22,800 (8 per cent).
- Caring for ill or elderly person/relative – 17,000 (6 per cent).

Not looking for work

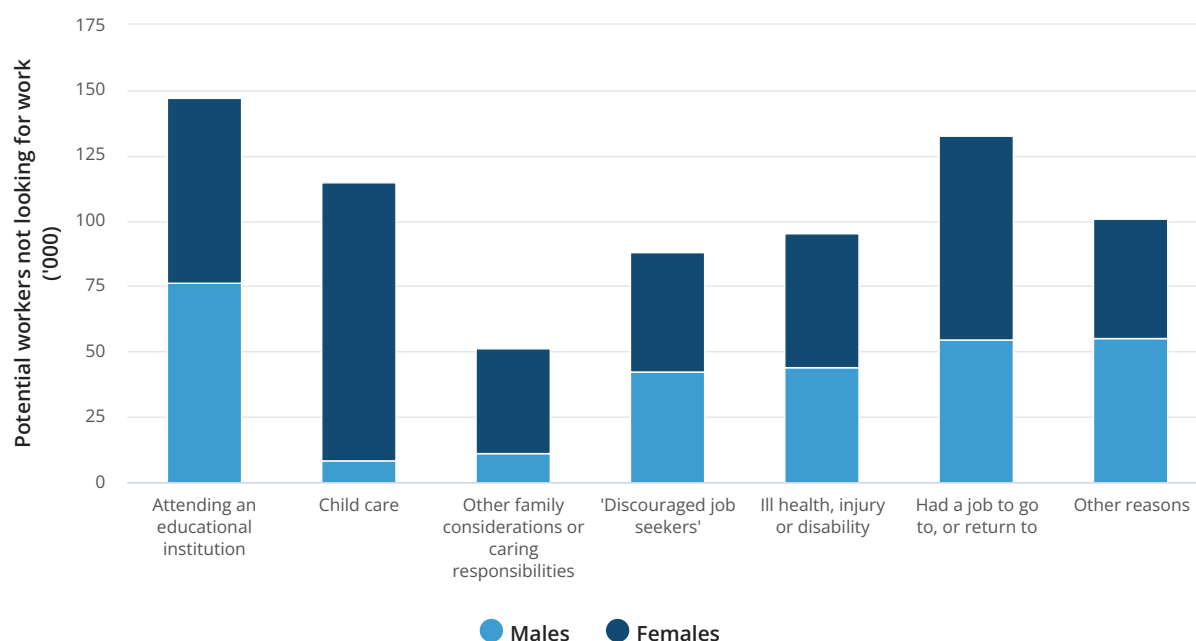
People who were unavailable for work in the short to medium-term may not begin looking for work until it is closer to the time when they will be able to work. Of those who were not available within four weeks:

- 45,400 looked for work.
- 239,900 did not look for work.

There were 745,000 people who wanted to work, were available to start either immediately or within four weeks, but did not actively look for work. The main reasons they did not actively look for work were:

- Attending an educational institution – 146,600.
- Child care – 113,600.
- '[Discouraged job seekers \(/methodologies/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia-methodology/feb-2022#glossary\)](#)' – 88,000.

Chart 6: Main reason people who were available to start work within four weeks were not looking for work



Difficulties finding work

In February 2022, of the 560,700 unemployed people, 84 per cent reported having difficulty finding work, down from 88 per cent in February 2021.

The main difficulty for job seekers in February 2022 was 'too many applicants for available jobs'.

Chart 7a: Main difficulty in finding work (part 1 - most common difficulties)

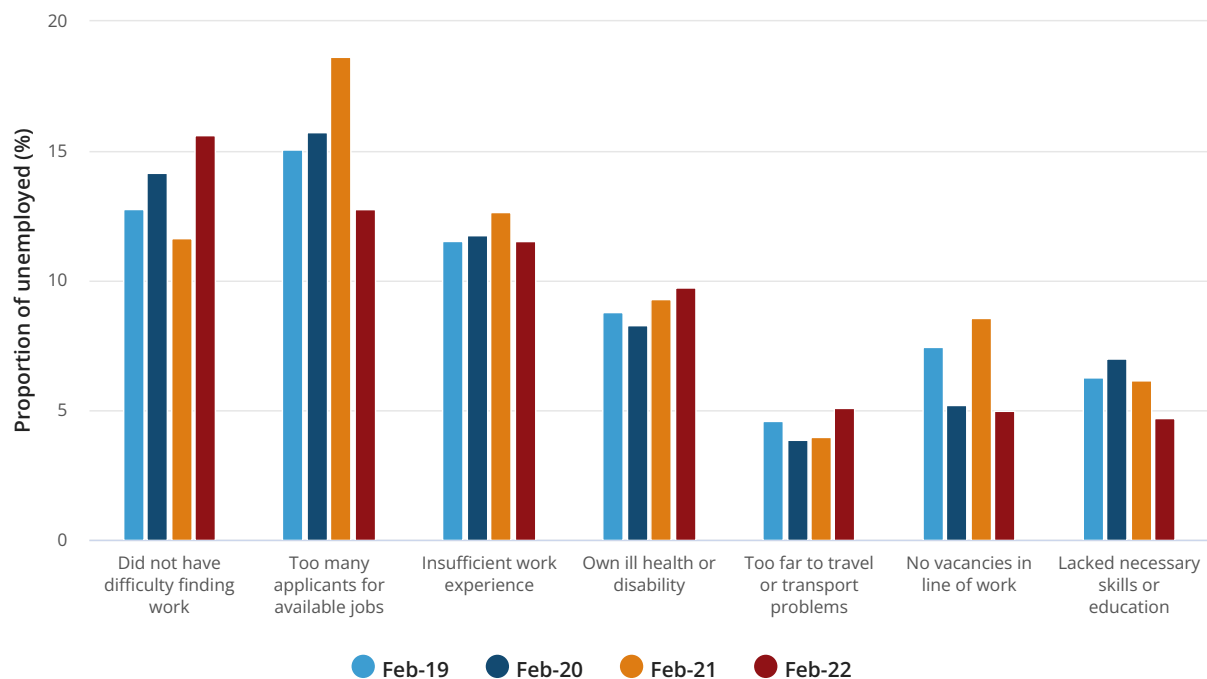
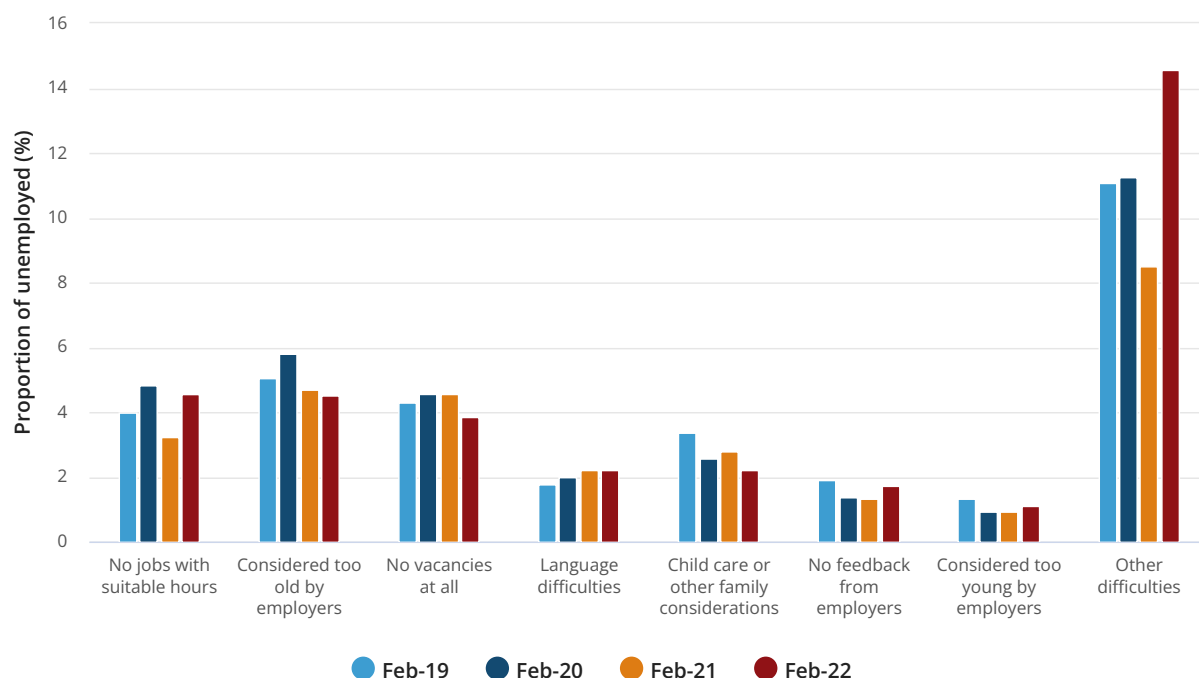


Chart 7b: Main difficulty in finding work (part 2 - least common difficulties)



People who don't want to work

In February 2022, there were 5.5 million people aged 15 years or over who did not want to work, or were permanently unable to work. The main activities of people who did not want to work were:

- Retired – 3.1 million (55 per cent of people who did not want to work).
- Ill health or disability – 683,000 (12 per cent).
- Home duties – 592,800 (11 per cent).
- Attending educational institution – 470,100 (9 per cent).

There were 671,400 people who were permanently unable to work.

Data downloads

Table 1: Potential workers and discouraged job seekers

[!\[\]\(125d701e9425b54c764340b5671b38cd_img.jpg\) **Download XLSX**](#)
[\[755.18 KB\]](#)

Table 2: Characteristics of discouraged job seekers and other potential workers

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[\[2.98 MB\]](#)

Table 3: Duration since last job and main activity of discouraged job seekers and other potential workers

[!\[\]\(e78f798d4ea5c530c9db49e7d26e6b95_img.jpg\) **Download XLSX**](#)
[\[3.43 MB\]](#)

Table 4: Main reason for not actively looking for work of persons who wanted to work and were available

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[\[470.31 KB\]](#)

Table 5: Job search experience of unemployed persons

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[\[1.36 MB\]](#)

Table 6: Characteristics of successful and unsuccessful job search experience

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[\[1.09 MB\]](#)

Table 7: Number of job offers while looking for work

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[\[2.43 MB\]](#)

Table 8: Main difficulty and duration of job search of unemployed persons

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[\[3.06 MB\]](#)

Table 9: Main difficulty in finding work by age of unemployed persons

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[\[2.1 MB\]](#)

All tables

[!\[\]\(cbd8541a32dfc32f356f5c6c994b0a21_img.jpg\) **Download ZIP**](#)
[\[14.27 MB\]](#)

Relative standard errors, Tables 1 to 9

[!\[\]\(40770d9ed6ed4f1222ebf89a1396e8b2_img.jpg\) **Download ZIP**](#)
[\[10.45 MB\]](#)

Previous catalogue number

This release uses ABS catalogue number 6228.0*.

Data from this release was previously published in:

- [Participation, Job Search and Mobility \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia) (6226.0**), 2015-2020.
- [Persons Not In the Labour Force, Underemployed Workers and Job Search Experience \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/BBB46A2E9C441282CA257DF40079A913?OpenDocument) (6226.0.55.001), 2014.
- [Persons Not In the Labour Force \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6220.0&viewtitle=Persons%20Not%20in%20the%20Labour%20Force,%20Australia~September%202013~Latest~26/03/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6220.0&issue=September%202013&num=&view=&\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6220.0&viewtitle=Persons%20Not%20in%20the%20Labour%20Force,%20Australia~September%202013~Latest~26/03/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6220.0&issue=September%202013&num=&view=&) (6220.0), 1975-2013.
- [Job Search Experience \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6222.0&viewtitle=Job%20Search%20Experience,%20Australia~July%202013~Latest~05/02/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6222.0&issue=July%202013&num=&view=&\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6222.0&viewtitle=Job%20Search%20Experience,%20Australia~July%202013~Latest~05/02/2014&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6222.0&issue=July%202013&num=&view=&) (6222.0), 1976-2013.
- [Labour Force Experience \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6206.0&viewtitle=Labour%20Force%20Experience,%20Australia~Feb%202011~Latest~31/08/2011&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6206.0&issue=Feb%202011&num=&view=&\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6206.0&viewtitle=Labour%20Force%20Experience,%20Australia~Feb%202011~Latest~31/08/2011&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6206.0&issue=Feb%202011&num=&view=&) (6206.0), 1968-2011.
- [Successful and Unsuccessful Job Search Experience \(https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6245.0&viewtitle=Successful%20and%20Unsuccessful%20Job%20Search%20Experience,%20Australia~Jul%202000~Latest~06/06/2001&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6245.0&issue=Jul%202000&num=&view=&\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/second+level+view?ReadForm&prodno=6245.0&viewtitle=Successful%20and%20Unsuccessful%20Job%20Search%20Experience,%20Australia~Jul%202000~Latest~06/06/2001&&tabname=Past%20Future%20Issues&prodno=6245.0&issue=Jul%202000&num=&view=&) (6245.0), 1982-2000.

* Note: Catalogue number 6228.0 was previously used for [Survey of Persons Registered with the CES as Unemployed \(Preliminary\), Mar 1977 \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6228.0\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6228.0).

** Note: Catalogue number 6226.0 was previously used for [School Leavers, 1970 to 1974: their Employment Status and Education Experience \(https://archive.org/details/62260-1975-05\)](https://archive.org/details/62260-1975-05), May 1975.

Methodology

[Participation, Job Search and Mobility, Australia methodology, February 2022](#)